

THE
Mischief OF Separation.

A
S E R M O N

Preached at

GUILD-HALL CHAPPEL,
May II, M DC LXXX. **Being the First Sunday**
in EATESR-TERM,

Before the

Lord Mayor, &c.

By *Edw. Stillingfleet*, D. D. Dean of *St. Paul's*, and
Chaplain in Ordinary to His Majesty.

The Second Edition.

Dublin, Printed by *Benjamin Took* and *John Crook*, Printers to the
Kings most Excellent Majesty; and are to be sold by *Mary*
Crook at His Majesties Printing-house in *Skinner-row*, 1680.

Clayton Mayor:

*Martis quarto die Maij 1680. Annoq; Regis
Caroli secundi, Angliæ, &c. xxxii.*

THis Court doth earnestly desire the Reverend Dr. *Stillingfleet*,
Dean of *St. Pauls*, to Print his Sermon Preached at the *Guild-
Hall* Chappel on *Sunday* Morning last, with what further he
had prepared to deliver at that time.

Wagstaff.

To the Right Honourable

S^R. Robert Clayton

Lord Mayor of the City of LONDON.

My Lord,

I*N obedience to Your Lordships Order I now present to Your hands, not only the Sermon You lately heard, but those Additions, which the straits of time would not then permit me to deliver. In all which, I was so far from intending to stir up the Magistrates and Judges to a Persecution of Dissenters, as some ill men have reported, that my only design was to prevent any occasion of it, by finding out a certain foundation for a lasting Union among our selves. Which is impossible to be attained, till men are convinced of the Evil and Danger of the present Separation; it being carried on by such Principles as not only overthrow the present Constitution of our Church, but any other whatsoever. For, if it be lawful to separate on a pretence of greater Purity, where there is an Agreement in Doctrine, and the substantial parts of Worship, as is acknowledged in our Case; then a bare difference of opinion as to some circumstances of Worship and the best constitution of Churches will be sufficient ground to break Communion and to set up new Churches: Which considering the great variety of mens fancies about these matters, is to make an infinite Divisibility in Churches, without any possible stop to farther Separation. But, if after themselves are pleased with condescensions to their own minds, any think it fit that others should be tied up, notwithstanding their dissatisfaction; the world will judge it too great partiality in them to think that none ought to separate but themselves, and that the same Reason will hold against themselves in the judgement of others; it thereby appearing, that it is not Uniformity they dislike, but that they do not prescribe the Terms of it.*

But, my Lord, I intend not to argue the Case of Separation here, (which is at large done in the following Discourse) but only to shew, how necessary it was in order to the laying a Foundation for Peace and Unity, to have this

made

The Epistle Dedicatory.

matter thoroughly discussed. And if once the People be brought to understand and practise their duty as to Communion with our Churches, other Difficulties which obstruct our Union will be more easily removed.

I have endeavoured to pursue my design in a way suitable to the nature of it, without sharp and provoking reflections on the Persons of any; which often set Friends at distance, but never reconciled or convinced Adversaries. However, I must expect the Censures of such who either make our Divisions, or make use of them for their own ends: but I am contented to be made a sacrifice, if thereby I might close up the Breaches among us.

God Almighty bless this great City and Your Lordships care in the Government of it; and grant that in this our day, we may yet know the things that belong to our Peace, and to the Preservation of the true Protestant Religion among us.

I am,

my Lord,

Your Lordships most faithful

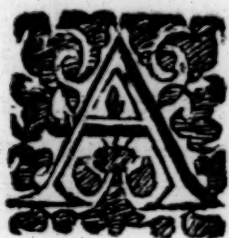
and obedient Servant,

Edward Stillingfleet.

P H I L.

P H I L. I I I. 16.

Nevertheless, whereto we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule, let us mind the same things.



Although the *Christian Religion* doth lay the greatest obligations on mankind to *Peace and Unity*, by the strictest commands, the highest examples, and the most prevailing arguments; yet so much have the passions and interests of men overwaid the sense of their duty, that as nothing ought to be more in our *wishes*, so nothing seems more remote from our *hopes*, than the *universal Peace* of the *Christian World*. Not that there is any impossibility in the thing, or any considerable difficulty, if all men were such Christians as they ought to be; but as long as men pursue their several factions and designs under the colour and pretence of zeal for Religion; if they did not find Names and parties ready framed, that were suitable to their ends, the difference of their designs would make them. So that till mens corruptions are mortified, and their passions subdued to a greater degree than the World hath yet found them, it is in vain to expect a state of peace and tranquillity in the Church. We need not go far from home for a sufficient evidence of this; for although our differences are such as the wiser Protestants abroad not only condemn but wonder at them; yet it hath hitherto puzzled the wisest persons among us to find out ways to compose them; not so much from the distance of mens opinions and practices, as the strength of their prejudices and inclinations. *Jdg. 5.* What those *divisions of Reuben* of old were, which caused *such thoughts and searchings of heart*, we neither well understand, nor doth it much concern us: but the continuance, if not the widening, of these unhappy breaches among our selves do give just cause for many sad reflections. When neither the miseries we have felt, nor the calamities we fear; neither the terrible judgments of God upon us; nor the unexpected deliverances vouchsafed to us, nor the common danger we are yet in, have abated mens heats, or allayed their passions, or made them more willing to unite with our established Church and Religion. But instead of that, some rather stand at a greater distance if not defiance, and seem to entertain themselves with hopes of new revolutions; others raise fresh calumnies and reproaches, as well as revive and spread abroad old ones; as though their business were to make our breaches wider, and to exasperate mens spirits against each other; at such a time, when Reason and common security, and above all our Religion obligeth us *to follow after the things that make for peace, and things wherewith one may edifie another*; and not such as tend to our mutual destruction; as most certainly our divisions and animosities do. Yet all *Rom. 14.* parties pretend to a zeal for Peace, so they may have it in their own way; by which it appears that it is not Peace they aim at but Victory; nor Unity so much as having their own wills. Those of the *Roman Church* make great boasts of their Unity and

and the effectual means they have to preserve it ; but God deliver us from such cruel wayes of Peace, and such destructive means of Unity as Treachery and Assassinations, and an Inquisition. *Their feet are swift to shed blood; destruction and misery are in their wayes ; and the way of peace they have not known.* But it were happy for us, if all those who agree in renouncing the Errors and Corruptions of the Roman Church, could as easily join together in the great duties of our common Religion, that is, in our prayers, and Praises, and Sacraments, and all solemn acts of Divine worship. For this would not only take off the reproach of our Adversaries, who continually upbraid us with our Schisms and Separations, but it would mightily tend to abate mens passions, and to remove their prejudices, and to dispose their inclinations, and thereby lay a foundation for a blessed Union among our selves, which would frustrate the great design of our enemies upon us, who expect to see that Religion destroyed by our own folly, which they could not otherwise hope to accomplish by their utmost care and endeavour. And we may justly hope for a greater blessing of God upon us, when we offer up our joint Prayers and Devotions to him, *lifting up, as St Paul speaks, holy hands without wrath and disputing.* This is therefore a thing of so great consequence to our Peace and Union, that tends so much to the Honour of God, and our common Safety and Preservation; that no person who hath any real concernment for these things, can deny it to be not only just and fitting, but in our circumstances necessary to be done, if it can be made appear to be lawful, or that they can do it with a good Conscience.

And this is the subject I design to speak to at this time; and for that purpose have made choice of these words of the Apostle, *Nevertheless, whereto we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule, let us mind the same things.*

For our better understanding the full scope and Meaning of the Apostle in these words, we are to consider, that an unhappy Schism, or wilful breach of the Churches Unity, had begun in the Apostles times, upon the difference that arose concerning the necessity of keeping the Law of Moses. And that which made the Schism the more dangerous, was that the first beginners of it pretended a commission from the Apostles themselves at Jerusalem, and were extremely busie and industrious to gain and keep up a party to themselves in the most flourishing Churches planted by the Apostles. At Antioch they bore so great a sway, that St. Peter himself complied with them, and not only other Jews, but Barnabas also was carryed away with their dissimulation. Inasmuch that had it not been for the courage and resolution of St. Paul, all the Gentile Christians had been either forced to a compliance with the Jews, or to a perpetual Schism, (of which St. Peter had been in probability the Head, and not of the Churches unity if St. Paul, had not vigorously opposed so dangerous a compliance) But finding so good success in his endeavours at Antioch, he pursues these false Apostles, who made it their business to divide and separate the Christians from each others Communion through all the Churches, where they had, or were like to make any great impression. He writes his Epistle to the Galatians purposely against them; he warns the Christians at Rome of them. Now I beseech you Brethren mark them which cause Divisions and Offences contrary to the Doctrine which you have learned, and avoid them. And because he had understood they had been busie at Philippi to make a party there too, therefore the Apostle to prevent their designs, Makes use of this following method.

1. He exhorts the *Philippians* to an unanimous and constant resolution, in holding fast to the faith of the Gospel, in spite of all the threats and malice of their enemies: *That ye stand fast in one spirit, with one mind, striving together for the faith of the Gospel; and in nothing terrified by your adversaries.* If once the fears of troubles and persecutions make men afraid to own and maintain their Religion, it will be an easie matter for their enemies first to divide, and then to subdue them. But their courage and unanimity in a good Cause baffles the attempts of the most daring Adversaries, and makes them willing to retreat when they see they can neither disunite them nor make them afraid.

2. He beseeches them in the most vehement and affectionate manner, not to give way to any differences or divisions among them, *If there be therefore any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the spirit, if any bowels and mercies; fulfil ye my joy, that ye be like minded, having the same love; being of one accord, of one mind.* As though he had said unto them, I have seen the miserable effects of divisions in other Churches already; how our Religion hath been reproached, the Gospel hindred, and the Cross of Christ rendred of little or no effect by reason of them; let me therefore intreat you, if you have any regard to the Peace and Welfare of your own souls; if you have any sense of your duty you owe to one another as members of the same body; if you have any tenderness or pity towards me, avoid the first tendencies to any breaches among you; entertain no unjust suspicions or jealousies of each other, shew all the kindness you are able to your fellow members; live as those that are acted by the same soul (*ὁμοθυμαδόν*) carry on the same design; and as much as possible prevent any differences in opinions amongst you.

3. He warns them and gives cautions against some persons from whom their greatest danger was, viz. such as pretended mighty zeal for the Law: And very well understanding the mischief of their designs under their specious pretences, he bestows very severe characters upon them, *vers. 2. Beware of Dogs, beware of evil workers, beware of the Circumcision.* All which Characters relate to the breaches and divisions which they made in the Christian Churches; which like *Dogs* they did tear in pieces and thereby did unspeakable mischief, and so were *evil workers*; and by the *Circumcision* *St. Chrysostom* understands such a cutting in pieces as tends to the destruction of a thing; and therefore, saith he, the Apostle called them *κατακεκοτομημένοι*, ὅτι τὴν Ἐκκλησίαν ἐκοτομήσαντες καὶ ἐξέσπασαν. because they endeavoured to cut in pieces, and thereby to destroy the Church of God. But lest they should give out that *St. Paul* spoke this out of a particular pique he had taken up against the Law of *Moses*, he declares that as to the spiritual intention and design of the Law it was accomplished in Christians, *vers. 3. For we are the Circumcision which worship God in the spirit, and rejoyce in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh.* And for his own part, he had as much reason to glory in legal priviledges as any of them all, *vers. 4, 5, 6.* but the excellency of the Gospel of Christ had so prevailed upon his mind, that he now despised the things he valued before, and made it his whole business to attain to the glorious reward which this Religion promiseth. This he pursues from *vers. 7, to vers. 15.*

4. Having done this he perswades all good Christians to do as he did, *vers. 15. Let us therefore, as many as be perfect, be thus minded.* But because many disputes and differences as to opinion and practice might happen among them, he therefore lays down two Rules for them to govern themselves by,

1. If any happen'd to differ from the body of Christians they lived with, they should do it with great modesty and humility, not breaking out into factions and divisions, but waiting for farther information, which they may expect that God will give upon a diligent and sober use of the best means; *And if in any thing ye be otherwise minded, God shall reveal even this unto you.* By leaving them to Gods immediate care for farther illumination, he doth not bid them depend upon extraordinary revelation; but requires them to wait upon God in his own way, without proceeding with the false Apostles to the ways of Faction and Separation; and in the mean time to go as far as they could.

2. For those who were come to a firmness and settlement of Judgment upon the Christian principles, he charges them by all means to preterve Unity and Peace among themselves. *Whereto we have already attained, let us walk by the same Rule, let us mind the same things.*

Wherein the Apostle supposes two things.

I. The necessity of one fixed and certain Rule, notwithstanding the different attainments among Christians. *Nevertheless, whereto we have already attained, let us walk by the same Rule.*

II. The duty and obligation which lies upon the best Christians to observe it, He doth not speak to the ignorant and unthinking multitude; not to the licentious rabble, nor to the carnal and worldly Church; which some think are only desirous of Uniformity; but to the very best Christians; to those *who had got the start of others* (as the words here signifie) that they would be an example of Peace and Unity to their Brethren.

I. *The necessity of one fixed and certain Rule, notwithstanding the different attainments of Christians.* *ἡ δὲ αὐτῶν συγκοινωνία* which Phrase seems to be a continuation of the former allusion to a Race. For as *Eusebius* observes, the first thing the Greeks were wont to do as to their exercises, was to circumscribe the bounds within which they were to be performed. That which fixed and determined these limits was called *Κανὼν* by the Greeks, and *Regula* and *Linea* by the Latins: thence *transilire lineas* in *Cicero* is to commit a fault, to break the bounds within which we are confined.

All the question is, what the Apostle means by this *Rule*, whether only a Rule of Charity and mutual forbearance, with a liberty of different practice; or such a *Rule* which limits and determines the manner of practice. It cannot be the former, because that is the case, the Apostle had spoken to just before. *If in any thing ye be otherwise minded*; therefore now subjoining this with respect to those who had gone beyond them, he doth imply such an agreement and uniformity of Practice as doth lie in observing the same standing Rule. For which we must consider, that they understood already what orders and directions he had given them when a Church was first formed among them; and therefore when the Apostle mentions a Rule without declaring what it was, we have reason to believe, it was such a Rule which they very well knew, which he had given to them before. So we find elsewhere the Apostle refers to such Rules of Government and Order, which he had given to other Churches, and were already received and practised among them. For the Apostles did not write their Epistles for the founding of Churches, but they were already in being; only they took notice of any disorders among them, and reformed abuses, and left some things to *their own* directions, when they should come among them.

them. *And the rest will I set in order when I come.* At the Lord hath called every one, ^{1 Cor. 11.} so let him walk; and so ordain I in all the Churches. Which shews that the Apostles ^{24.} did not leave all persons to act as they judged fit, but did make Rules determining ^{1 Cor. 7.} their practice, and obliging them to uniformity therein. For might not men pre- ^{17.} tend that these were not things in themselves necessary, and might be scrupled by some persons, and therefore were not fit to be imposed upon any? But I do not find that the Apostles on this account did forbear giving Rules in such cases, and to oblige Christians to observe them; and that not on the meer Authority of Apostles, but as Governours of Churches, whose business it is to take care of the welfare and preservation of them. There are many things which seem very little and inconsiderable in themselves, whose consequence and tendency is very great; and the wisdom of Governours lies in preventing the danger of little things, and keeping the zeal of well-meaning persons within its due bounds. For, those who are engaged below in the valley, fighting in small parties, and pursuing their advantages, do run into their enemies Camp before they are aware of it, may receive an unexpected check from their Commanders in chief, who from the higher ground espy the hazard they are in by their over-forwardness, and the arts which their enemies use in drawing them into little Companies to fight separately, and the danger they may thereby bring upon the whole Army; and therefore send them a peremptory order to give over fighting by themselves and make good their retreat into the Body of the Army: They wonder, they complain, they think themselves hardly used; but no understanding man blames their Generals who regard their safety more than they do themselves, and know the allowing them the Liberty they desire, would endanger the destruction of them all. This Wisdom and Conduct of Governours, is quite another thing from the Zeal and Courage of inferiour persons; who knowing their own resolution and integrity, think much to be controlled; but those who stand upon higher Ground and see further than they can do, must be allowed a better capacity of judging what makes for the safety of the whole, than they can have: and such things which they look on in themselves, and therefore think them mean and trifling, the other look upon them in their consequence, and the influence they may have upon the publick safety. It were extremely desirable that all good and useful men should enjoy as much satisfaction as might be, but if it cannot be attained without running great hazards of unsettling all, it is then to be considered, whether the general safety or some mens particular satisfaction be the more desirable. And this is that, which the example of the Apostles themselves gives us reason to consider, for although there were many doubts and scruples in their times about several Rites and Customs, yet the Apostles did give Rules in such cases, and bind ^{Acts 15.} Christians to observe them; as we find in that famous decree made upon great ^{28.} deliberation, in a Council of the Apostles at Jerusalem; wherein therein they determined those things which they knew were then scrupled, and continued so to be afterwards, wherever the Judaizing Christians prevailed. But notwithstanding all their dissatisfaction, the Apostles continued the same Rule; and S. Paul here requires the most forward Christians to mind their Rule, and to preserve Peace and Unity among themselves.

But doth not S. Paul in the 14th. Chapter of his Epistle to the Romans lay down quite another Rule, viz. only of mutual forbearance in such cases, where men are unsatisfied in Conscience?

I answer, that the Apostle did act like a prudent Governour, and in such a manner, as he thought, did most tend to the propagation of the Gospel, and the good of particular Churches. In some Churches that consisted most of *Jews*, as the Church of *Rome* at this time did, and where they did not impose the necessity of keeping the Law on the Gentile Christians (as we do not find they did at *Rome*) the Apostle was willing to have the Law buried as decently, and with as little noise as might be; and therefore in this case, he perswades both parties to Forbearance and Charity, in avoiding *the judging and censuring one another*, since *they had an equal regard to the honour of God in what they did*. But in those Churches, where the false Apostles made use of this pretence, of the Levitical Law being still in force, to divide the Churches, and to separate the Communion of Christians; there the Apostle bids them beware of them, and their practices; as being of a dangerous and pernicious consequence. So that the preserving the Peace of the Church, and preventing Separation was the great measure, according to which, the Apostle gave his directions; and that makes him so much insist on *the advice to the Philippians*, that whatever their attainments in Christianity were, they should *walk by the same Rule, and mind the same things*.

Rom 14.
 2. 6, 10.

11. We take notice of the Duty and obligation that lies upon the best Christians, *to walk by the same Rule, to mind the same things*.

From whence arise two very considerable Enquiries.

1. How far the obligation doth extend to comply with an established Rule, and to preserve the Peace of the Church we live in;

2. What is to be done, if men cannot come up to that Rule? For the Apostle speaks only of such as have attained so far; *Wherein we have already attained, let us walk by the same Rule*.

1. How far the obligation doth extend to comply with an established Rule, and to preserve the Peace of the Church we live in? This I think the more necessary to be spoken to, because I cannot perswade my self that so many scrupulous and conscientious men as are at this day among us would live so many years in a known sin; i. e. in a state of Separation from the Communion of a Church, which in Conscience they thought themselves obliged to communicate with. It must be certainly some great mistake in their judgements must lead them to this; (for I am by no means willing to impute it to passion and evil designs) and out of the hearty desire I have, if possible, to give satisfaction in this matter, I shall endeavour to search to the bottom of this dangerous mistake, to which we owe so much of our present distractions & fears.

But for the better preventing all mis-understanding the design of my Discourse, I desire it may be considered.

1. That I speak not of the Separation or distinct Communion of *whole Churches* from each other; which according to the Scripture, Antiquity and Reason, have a just Right and Power to Govern and Reform themselves. By *whole Churches*, I mean, the Churches of such Nations, which upon the decay of the *Roman Empire*, resumed their just Right of Government to themselves, and upon their owning Christianity, incorporated into one Christian Society, under the same common ties and Rules of Order and Government. Such as the Church of *Macedonia* would have been, if from being a Roman Province it had become a Christian Kingdom, and the Churches of *Thessalonica*, *Philippi* and the rest had united together. And so the several Churches

Churches of the *Lydian* or *Proconsular Asia*, if they had been united in one Kingdom, and governed by the same Authority, under the same Rules, might have been truly called the *Lydian Church*. Just as several Families uniting make one Kingdom, which at first had a distinct and independent Power, but it would make strange confusion in the world to reduce Kingdoms back again to Families, because at first they were made up of them. Thus National Churches are National Societies of Christians, under the same Laws of Government and Rules of Worship. For the true notion of a Church is no more than of a Society of men united together for their Order and Government according to the Rules of the Christian Religion. And it is a great mistake, to make the notion of a Church barely to relate to *Acts of Worship*; and consequently that the adequate notion of a Church is an *Assembly for Divine Worship*; by which means they appropriate the name of Churches to particular Congregations. Whereas, if this held true, the Church must be dissolved as soon as the *Congregation* is broken up; but if they retain the nature of a Church, when they do not meet together for Worship, then there is some other bond that unites them; and whatever that is, it constitutes the Church. And if there be one Catholick Church consisting of multitudes of particular Churches consenting in one Faith; then why may there not be one National Church from the consent in the same Articles of Religion, and the same Rules of Government and Order of Worship? Nay, if it be mutual consent and agreement which makes a Church, then why may not National Societies agreeing together in the same Faith, and under the same Government and Discipline, be as truly and properly a Church, as any particular Congregation? For, is not the *Kingdom of France* as truly a Kingdom consisting of so many Provinces; as the *Kingdom of Ivetot* once was in *Normandy*, which consisted of a very small territory? Among the *Athenians*, from whom the use of the word *ἐκκλησία* came into the Christian Church, it was taken for such an *Assembly* which had the *Power of Governing* and determining matters of Religion as well as the affairs of *State*. For the Senate of 500 being distributed into fifties according to the number of the Tribes, which succeeded by course through the year; and was then called *ἐξουσιούσων πόλις*; every one of these had 4 *ἐπιμεληταί* Regular *Assemblies*; in the last of which, an account of the *Sacrifices* was taken and of other matters which concerned Religion; as in the *Comicia Calata* at Rome. From whence we may observe, that it was not the meeting of one of the single Tribes, was called *ἐκκλησία*, but the General Meeting of the *Magistrates* of the whole City and the people together. And in this sense I shall shew afterwards, the word was used in the first Ages of the Christian Church, as it comprehended the Ecclesiastical Governours and the People of whole Cities; and why many of these Cities being united under one Civil Government, and the same Rules of Religion should not be called one National Church, I cannot understand. Which makes me wonder at those who say they cannot tell what we mean by the Church of England; in short, we mean, that Society of Christian People which in this Nation are united under the same Profession of Faith, the same Laws of Government, and rules of Divine Worship. And every Church thus constituted, we do assert to have a just Right of Governing it self, and of reforming Errors in Doctrine and Corruptions in Worship.

On which Ground, we are acquitted from the imputation of Schism in the separation from the Roman Church; for we only resume our just Rights, as the British

Rob. Cevalis Hist. Galic. l. 1. p. 126.

Jul. Polux Onomast. l. 8. c. 9.

Schol. in Arist. Acharn. Act. 1. 1.

Sacrilegious desertion, p. 35. Separation yet no Schism, p. 59.

British Nation did, as to Civil Government, upon the Roman Empire.

1. I do not intend to speak of the Terms upon which Persons are to be admitted among us to the Exercise of the Function of the Ministry; but of the Terms of Lay-Communion; i. e. those which are necessary for all Persons to joyn in our Prayers and Sacraments and other Offices of Divine Worship. I will not say, there hath been a great deal of Art used to confound these two, (and it is easie to discern to what purpose it is,) but I dare say, the Peoples not understanding the difference of these two Cases hath been a great occasion of the present Separation. For in the Judgment of some of the most impartial men of the Dissenters at this day, although they think the case of the Ministers very hard on the account of Subscriptions and Declarations required of them; yet they confess very little is to be said on the behalf of the People from whom none of those things are required. So that the People are condemned in their Separation, by their own Teachers; but how they can preach lawfully to a People who commit a fault in hearing them, I do not understand.

2. I do not confound bare suspending Communion in some particular Rite, which persons do modestly scruple, and using it in what they judge to be lawful; with either total, or at least ordinary forbearance of Communion in what they judge to be lawful; and proceeding to the forming of Separate Congregations; i. e. under other Teachers, and by other Rules than what the established Religion allows. And this is the present case of Separation which I intend to consider, and to make the sinfulness and mischief of it appear.

But that I may do it more convincingly, I will not make the difference wider than it is; but lay down impartially the state of the present Controversie between us and our dissenting Brethren, about Communion with our Churches,

1. They unanimously confess they find no fault with the Doctrine of our Church, and can freely subscribe to all the Doctrinal Articles; nay they profess greater zeal for many of them, than, say they, some of our own Preachers do. Well then! The case is vastly different as to their separation from us, and our separation from the Church of Rome; for we declare, if there were nothing else amiss among them, their Doctrines are such, as we can never give our assent to.

2. * They generally yield, that our Parochial Churches are true Churches; and it is with these their Communion is required. They do not deny that we have all the essentials of true Churches, true Doctrine, true Sacraments; and an implicate Covenant between Pastors and People. And some of the most eminent of the Congregational way have declared; that they look upon it as an unjust calumny cast upon them, that they look upon our Churches as no true Churches.

3. Many of them declare, that they hold communion with our Churches to be lawful. Yea we are told in Print, by one then present, that A. D. 1663, divers of their Preachers in London met to consider, how far it was lawful, or their duty to communicate with the Parish Churches where they lived, in the Liturgy and Sacraments; and that the Relator brought in twenty Reasons to prove that it is a duty to some to joyn with some Parish Churches three times a year in the Lords Supper; after he had not only proved it lawful to use a form of Prayer, and to joyn in the use of our Liturgy, but in the participation of the Sacrament with us, and no one of the Brethren, he adds, seemed to dissent, but to take the Reasons to be valid. Such another meeting, We are told, they had after

Peace-of-
ferring in
the name
of the
Congre-
gational
party,
A. D.
1667.
p. 10. 11.
Baxters
Defence
of his
Cure,
p. 64.
separati-
on yet no
Schism,
p. 60.
* Dis-
course
concern-
ing evan-
gelical
Love,
Church
peace &
Unity,
1672. p.
84, 85,
86. See
Serbet of
Schism,
p. 41
Baxters
Defence
of his
Cure, p.
33,

the

the Plague and Fire, at which they agreed that Communion with our Churches was in it self lawful and good. Who could have imagined otherwise, than that after the weighty peace of so many Reasons, and such a general consent among them, they should have all joyned with us in what themselves judged to be lawful, and in many cases a duty? But instead of this, we have rather since that time found them more inclinable to courses of separation, filling the people with greater prejudices against our Communion, and gathering them into fixed and separate Congregations; which have proceeded to the choice of new Pastors upon the death of old ones; and except some very few, scarce any, either of their Preachers or People here, come ordinarily to the publick Congregations. And this is that which at present we lament as a thing which unavoidably tends to our common ruine, if not in time prevented; for by this means the hearts of the People are alienated from each other, who apprehend the differences to be much greater than their Teachers will allow, when they are put to declare their minds; and our common enemies take as much advantage from our differences, as if they were really far greater than they are.

But you may ask, what then are the grounds of the present Separation? for that there is such a thing is discernible by all, but what the reasons of it are is hard to understand after these concessions; yet it is not conceivable that conscientious men can in such a juncture of affairs persist in so obstinate and destructive a course of separation, unless they had something at last fit to answer the *twenty Reasons* of their own Brethren against it?

I have endeavoured to give my self satisfaction in a matter of so great moment to the Peace and preservation of this Church, and consequently of the Protestant Religion among us; which I never expect to see survive the destruction of the Church of England.

And the utmost I can find in the best Writers of the several Parties, amounts to these two things.

1. *That although they are in a state of separation from our Church, yet this separation is no sin.*

2. *That a State of Separation would be a sin, but notwithstanding their meeting in different places, yet they are not in a state of separation.*

And herein lies the whole strength of the several Pleas at this day made use of to justify the Separate Congregations: both which I shall now examine.

1. Some plead, that it is true they have distinct and separate Communion from us, but it is no sin, or culpable separation so to have. For, say they, Our Lord Christ instituted only Congregational Churches, or particular Assemblies for Divine Worship, which having the sole Church power in themselves, they are under no obligation of Communion with other Churches, but only to preserve Peace and Charity with them. And to this doctrine, others of late approach so near, that they tell us, that to devise new species of Churches (beyond Parochial or Congregational) without Gods Authority, and to impose them on the world (yea in his name) and call all Dissenters Schismatics. is a far worse usurpation, than to make or impose new Ceremonies or Liturgies. Which must suppose Congregational Churches to be so much the Institution of Christ, that any other Constitution above these is both unlawfull and insupportable. Which is more than the Independent Brethren themselves do assert.

Discourse concerning Evangelical Love, Church Peace and Unity, p. 68. Brethren true and only way of Concord, A. D. 680. P. 111;

But to clear the practice of *Separation* from being a sin on this account, two things are necessary to be done.

1. To prove that a Christian hath no obligation to external Communion beyond a Congregational Church.

1. That it is lawful to break off Communion with other Churches, to set up a particular independent Church,

Evange. 2. That a Christian hath no obligation to external Communion beyond a particular Congregational Church. They do not deny, that men by Baptism are admitted into the Catholic love, the visible Church as Members of it; and that there ought to be a sort of Communion by mutual Love among all that belong to this Body: and to do them Right, they declare that they look upon the Church of England, or the Generality of the Nation professing Christianity, to be as sound and healthful a part of the Catholic Church, as any in the World. But then they say, Communion in ordinances must be only in such Churches as Christ himself instituted by unalterable Rules, which were only particular and Congregational Churches.

P. 39.

Granting this to be true, how doth it hence appear not to be a sin to separate from our Parochial Churches, which according to their own concessions have all the Essentials of true Churches? And what Ground can they have to separate and divide those Churches, which for all that we can see, are of the same nature with the Churches planted by the Apostles at Corinth, Philippi or Thessalonica? But I must needs say further, I have never yet seen any tolerable proof, that the Churches planted by the Apostles were limited to Congregations. It is possible, at first, there might be no more Christians in one City than could meet in one Assembly for Worship; but where doth it appear, that when they multiplied into more Congregations, they did make new and distinct Churches, under new Officers with a Separate Power of Government? Of this, I am well assured, there is no mark or footstep in the New Testament, or the whole History of the Primitive Church. I do not think it will appear credible to any considerate man, that the 5000 Christians in the Church of Jerusalem made one stated and fixed Congregation for divine Worship; not if we make all the allowances for strangers which can be desired: but if this were granted, where are the unalterable Rules that as soon as the company became too great for one particular Assembly, they must become a new Church under peculiar Officers and an independent Authority?

It is very strange, that those who contend so much for the Scriptures being a perfect Rule of all things pertaining to worship and Discipline, should be able to produce nothing in so necessary a Point. If that of which we read the clearest instances in Scripture, must be the standard of all future Ages, much more might be said for limiting Churches to private families, than to particular Congregations. For, do we not read of the Church that was in the House of Priscilla and Aquila at Rome; of the Church that was in the House of Nymphas at Colosse; and in the House of Philemon at Laodicea? Why then should not Churches be reduced to particular Families, when by that means they may fully enjoy the Liberty of their Consciences, and avoid the scandal of breaking the Laws? But if, notwithstanding such plain examples, men will extend Churches to Congregations of many Families; why may not others extend Churches to those Societies which consist of

Rom 16.
3. 5.

Colos. 4.
15.

Philem. 2.

many *Congregations*? Especially considering, that the Apostles when they instituted Churches, did appoint such Officers in them, as had not barely a respect to those already converted, but to as many as by their means should be added to the Church; as *Clemens* affirms in his Epistle; *The Apostles*, saith he, *went about in Cities and Countries preaching the Gospel; and appointed their First-fruits, having made a spiritual trial of them, for Bishops and Deacons*, τῶν πρῶτων κειμένων, of those who were to believe. From *Corinth.* hence the number of Converts were looked on as an accession to the Original Church, *Ep. 2. c. 35.* and were under the care and Government of the Bishop and Presbyters, who were first settled there. For although when the Churches increased, the occasional meetings were frequent in several places; yet still there was but *one Church*, and *one Altar*, and *one Baptistry*, and *one Bishop*, with many *Presbyters* assisting him. And this is so very plain in Antiquity, as to the Churches planted by the Apostles themselves in several parts, that none but a great stranger to the History of the Church can ever call it in question. I am sure *Calvin*, a person of great and deserved reputation among our Brethren, looks upon this as a matter out of dispute among learned men, that a Church did not only take in the Christians of a whole City, but of the adjacent Country too: and the contrary opinion is a very novel and late fancy of some among us, and hath not age enough to plead a Prescription: It is true, after some time in the greater Cities, they had distinct places allotted and Presbyters fixed among them; and such allotments were called *Titles* at *Rome*, and *Laure* at *Alexandria*, and *Parishes* in other places; but these were never thought then to be new Churches, or to have any independent Government in themselves; but were all in subjection to the Bishop and his Colledge of Presbyters, of which multitudes of Examples might be brought from most authentick Testimonies of Antiquity; if a thing so evident needed any proof at all. And yet this distribution even in Cities was so uncommon in those elder times, that *Epiphanius* takes notice of it as an extraordinary thing at *Alexandria*; and therefore it is probably supposed there was no such thing in all the Cities of *Greece* in his time. And if we look over the antient Canons of the Church, we shall find two things very plain in them, (1.) That the notion of a Church was the same with that of a Diocese; or such a number of Christians as were under the inspection of a Bishop. (2.) That those Presbyters who rejected the Authority of their Bishop, or affected *separate meetings*, where no fault could be found with the Doctrine of a Church, were condemned of Schism. So the followers of *Eustathius Sebastenus*, who withdrew from the publick Congregations on pretence of greater sanctity and purity, in *Paphlagonia*, were condemned by the Council at *Gangræ*; so where those who separated from their Bishops, though otherwise never so orthodox, by the Council at *Constantinople*, and the Council at *Carthage*; wherein before *St. Cyprian* had so justly complained of the Schism of *Felicissimus* and his Brethren, who on pretence of some disorders in the Church of *Carthage* had withdrawn to the Mountains; and there laid the foundation of the *Novatian* Schism. But when false Doctrine was imposed on Churches, as by the *Arian* Bishops at *Antioch*, then the people were excused in their separations; so at *Rome* when *Felix* was made Bishop; and at *Sirmium* when *Photinus* published his Heresie; but I do not remember one instance in Antiquity, wherein separation from Orthodox Bishops and setting

Unicuique civitati erat tributa certa regio, quæ Presbyteros inde sumeret, & velut corpori Ecclesie illius accenseretur, *Calvin Instit. l. 4. c. 4. n. 2.*

Clem. Ep. 2.

Corinth. Ep. 2. c. 35.

Petavi not. in Epiphani. hær. 69. n. 1.

Canon. Nicæn. 6.

15. 16. Constan. c. 6.

Chalced. 17. 20. 16.

Antioch. c. 2. Codex Eccl. A-

fric. c. 53.

c. 55. Concil. Gangr. c. 6.

Concil. Conf. c. 6.

Concil. Carthag. c. 10. 11.

Cyprian. Ep. 40. 42.

Theod. Eccl. hist. l. 1. c. 22.

L. 2. c. 24. c. 17.

vincent, up c. 16.

up Meetings without their Authority and against their consent, was acquitted from the sin of *Schism*. Indeed some Bishops have sometimes refused Communion with others upon great misdemeanors; as *Theognostus* and *St. Martin* with the *Ithacian* party on the account of the death of *Prieillian*, but this doth not at all reach to the case of Presbyters separating from Bishops, with whom they agree in the same faith. The followers of *St. Chrysostom*, did, I confess, continue their separate Meetings after his banishment, and the coming in of *Arsacius*: but although they withdrew in his time, being unsatisfied in the manner of his choice; yet when *Atticus* restored the name of *St. Chrysostom* to the *Diptychs* of the Church, they returned to communion with their Bishop, as *St. Chrysostom* himself advised them (as appears by *Palladius*) which is far from justifying the wilful separation of Presbyters and People from the Communion of their Bishops, when they do agree in the same Faith.

2. But suppose the first Churches were bare Congregational, by reason of the small number of Believers at that time, yet *what obligation lies upon us to disturb the Peace of the Church we live in to reduce Churches to their infant states?* They do not think it necessary to reduce the first Community of Goods, which was far more certainly practised than Congregational Churches; they do not think it necessary to *wash one anothers feet*, although Christ did it, and bad his Disciples *do as he did*: they believe that the first civil Government was appointed by God himself over Families; do they therefore think themselves bound to overthrow Kingdoms to bring things back to their first institution? If not, why shall the Peace of the Church be in so much worse a condition than that of the Civil-state. It is very uncertain whether the Primitive form were such as they fancy; if it were, it is more uncertain whether it were not so from the circumstances of the times, rather than from any institution of Christ; but it is most certainly our duty to preserve Peace and Unity among Christians; & it is impossible so to do if men break all Orders in pieces for the fancy they have taken up of a Primitive Platform. It is a great fault among some who pretend to great niceness in some positive Duties, that they have so little regard to comparative Duties: For that which may be a duty in one case, when it comes to thwart a greater Duty: may be none. This Doctrine we learn from our blessed Saviour in the case of the obligation of the Sabbath; which he makes to yield to duties of Mercy. And can we think that a duty lying upon us, which in our circumstances makes a far greater Duty impracticable? Is there any thing Christ and his Apostles have charged more upon the Consciences of all Christians, than studying to preserve Peace and Unity among Christians? This is that *we must follow after*, even when it seems to fly from us; this is that *we must apply our minds to*, and think it our honour to promote; this is that which the most perfect Christians and the most zealous for; this is that, for the sake of which we are commanded to practise meekness, humility, patience, self-denial and submission to Governours. And after all this, can we imagine the attaining of such an end should depend upon mens conjectures, whether five thousand Christians in times of persecution could make one Assembly for Worship? Or whether all the Christians in Ephesus or Corinth made but one Congregation? On what terms can we ever hope for Peace in the Church, if such Notions as these be ground enough to disturb it? What stop can be put to Schism and Separation, if such pretences as these be sufficient to justify them. Men may please themselves in talking of preserving Peace and

Love under separate Communion; but our own sad experience shews the contrary; for as nothing tends more to unite mens hearts than joyning together in the same Prayers and Sacraments; so nothing doth more alienate mens Affections, than withdrawing from each other into separate Congregations. Which tempts some to spiritual Pride and scorn and contempt of others, as of a more carnal and worldly Church than themselves; and provokes others to lay open the follies, and indiscretions and immoralities of those who pretend to so much Purity and Spirituality above their Brethren.

2. Others confess, that to live in a state of separation from such Churches, as many at least of ours are, were a sin; for they say, that causeless renouncing communion with true Churches is Schism, especially if it be joyned with setting up Anti-churches unwarrantably against them; but this they deny that they do, although they preach when and where it is forbidden by Law; and worship God, and administer Sacraments by other Rules and after a different manner than what our Church requires. This is not dealing with us with that fairness and ingenuity which our former Brethren used; for they avow the fact of Separation, but deny it to be sinful; thus owning it to be sinful, have no other refuge left but to deny the fact, which is evident to all persons. For do they not do the very same things and in the same manner, that the others do; how comes it then to be Separation in some and not in others? They are very unwilling to confess a Separation, because they have formerly condemned it with great severity; and yet they do the same things for which they charged others as guilty of a sinful Separation.

For, the Assembly of Divines urged their dissenting Brethren to comply with their Rules of Church-Government, and charged them with Schism if they did it not; whereas they only desired to enjoy such liberty as to their separate Congregations, as is now pleaded for by our dissenting Brethren. This, say they, would give countenance to a perpetual Schism and Division in the Church still drawing away some from the Churches under the Rule, which also would breed irritations between the Parties; and would introduce all manner of confusion. And they thought it a very unreasonable thing for them to desire distinct and separated Congregations, as to those parts of worship where they could joyne in communion with them: and they thought no person was to be indulged as to any Error or Scruple of conscience; but with this Proviso, that in all other parts of worship they joyne with the Congregation wherein they live; and be under the Government to be established. To this the dissenting Brethren answered, that such a variation, or forbearance could neither be a Schism, nor endanger it; and that the great cause of Schism hath been a strict obligation of all to Uniformity; that as long as in their separate Congregations they did practise most of the same things, and the most substantial in their Rule, it could not be called a total Separation, especially considering, that they professed their Churches to be true Churches; and that they had occasional communion with them, which is the very same Plea made use of at this day among us. To which the Assemblies party finally replied, that since they acknowledged their Churches to be so true, that they could occasionally joyne in all Acts of Worship, they conceived they were bound to admit them in joynt communion by one common Rule, and not by different Rules in separate Congregations. And they add, that to leave all ordinary Communion in any Church with dislike, when opposition or offence offers it self; is to separate from such a Church in

True way of concord, part 3. ch. 1. Sect. 40.

Papers for Accommodation, printed 1643 p. 16. p. 20. 21. p. 22. p. 23.

p. 29. 30.

p. 47.

p. 55.

the Scripture sense; such separation was not in being in the Apostles times, unless it were used by false Teachers; all who professed Christianity held Communion together, as in one Church, notwithstanding differences of Judgment, or corruptions in practice; and that, if they can hold occasional Communion without sin, they know no reason why it may not be ordinary without sin too, and then separation would be needless. To which they subjoin these remarkable words, which I heartily wish our brethren at this day would think seriously upon, *To separate from those Churches ordinarily and visibly with whom occasionally you may join without sin, seemeth to be a most unjust separation.* So that whatever false colours and pretences some men make use of to justify their present practice, if the judgement of their own Brethren may be taken upon the most weighty debate, and most serious deliberation, it is no better than plain and down right separation. And I must needs say, I never saw any Cause more weakly defended, no, not that of Polygamy and Anabaptism; than that of those, who allow it to be lawful to join in Communion with us, and yet go about to vindicate the *separate Meetings* among us, from the guilt of a *sinful separation*. For although they allow our Churches to be true, and that it is lawful to communicate with them, which is the most plausible Plea they have, this is so far from extenuating, that it doth aggravate the fault; for as the Brethren of the Assembly said, *Though they do not pronounce an affirmative Judgement against us; yet the very separating is a tacit and practical condemning of our Churches, if not as false, yet as impure.*

But whatever may be said as to other Pleas for their present practices, my Text seems to afford the strongest of all, *viz.* that men are to be pressed to go no farther than they have already attained, and not to be strained up to an uniformity beyond the dictates of their Consciences, but to be let alone, as the Apostle directs in the foregoing verse, *If any one be otherwise minded, he must be left to God,* and that manifestation of his will, which he will be pleased to give him.

The clearing of this will give a full answer to the second enquiry, *viz.*

2. *What is to be done, if men cannot come up to the Rule prescribed.*

To this therefore I answer in these particulars.

1. *This can never justify men in not doing what they lawfully may do.* For this Rule of the Apostle makes Communion necessary, as far as it is lawful; & that upon the account of the general obligation lying upon all Christians to do what in them lies for preservation of the peace of the Church. Therefore as far as ye have attained walk by the same Rule, *do the same things*; which words, saith Cajetan, the Apostle subjoins to the former, lest the persons he there speaks to should think themselves excused from going as far as they can as to the same Rule. Which plainly shews that men are bound in Conscience to go as far as they can; and I cannot see how it is consistent with that *tenderness of conscience* which our Brethren pretended to, for so many of them to live so many yeares in a neglect of that Communion with our Church, which themselves judge to be lawful.

I dare say, if most of the Preachers at this day in the *separate Meetings* were soberly asked their judgements, whether it were lawful for the People to joyn with us in the publick Assemblies, they would not deny it; and yet the People that frequent them generally judge otherwise. For it is not to be supposed, that faction among them should so commonly prevail beyond interest; and therefore if they thought it were lawful for them to comply with the Laws, they would do it. But why then is this

this kept up as such a mighty secret in the breasts of their Teachers ? Why do they not preach it to them in their Congregations ? Is it for fear, they should have none left to preach to ? that is not to be imagined of mortified and conscientious men. Is it lest they should seem to condemn themselves, while they preach against Separation in a separate Congregation ?

This, I confess, looks oddly, and the tenderness of a mans mind in such a case, may out of meer shamefacedness keep him from declaring a Truth which lies in his face, while he speaks it.

Is it that they fear the Reproaches of the People ? which some few of the most eminent persons among them, have found they must undergo if they touch upon this Subject (for I know not how it comes to pass, that the most godly people among them can the least endure to be told of their faults.) But is it not as plainly written by S. Paul, *If I yet please men I should not be the Servant of Christ ; as Woe be unto me if I preach not the Gospel ?* If they therefore would acquit themselves like honest and conscientious men, let them tell the people plainly that they look on our Churches as true Churches, and that they may lawfully communicate with us in Prayers and Sacraments ; and I do not question but in time, if they find it lawful, they will judge it to be their Duty. For it is the Apostles Command here, *Whereto we have already attained let us walk by the same Rule, let us mind the same things.*

2. If the bare dissatisfaction of mens Consciences do justifie the lawfulness of Separation, and breaking an established Rule, it were to little purpose to make any Rule at all. Because it is impossible to make any, which ignorant and injudicious men shall not apprehend to be in some thing or other against the dictates of their Consciences. But because what we say may not weigh so much with them in this matter, as what was said on this Occasion by their own Brethren in the Assembly, I shall give an account of their Judgment in this matter.

The dissenting Brethren were not so much wanting to their Cause, as not to plead tenderness of Conscience with as much advantage and earnestness as any men now can do it. To which they answer,

1. That though tenderness of Conscience may justifie non-communication in the thing scrupled, yet it can never justifie Separation.

We much doubt, say they, whether such tenderness of Conscience, as ariseth out of an opinion, cui potest subesse falsum, (which may be false) when the Conscience is so tender, that it may be withal an erring Conscience, can be a sufficient ground to justifie such a material Separation, as our Brethren plead for ; For though it may bind, to forbear or suspend the Act of Communion in that particular wherein men conceive they cannot hold communion without sin (nothing being to be done contrary unto Conscience) yet it doth not bind to follow such a positive prescript as possibly may be divers from the will and counsel of God, of which kind we conceive this of gathering Separated Churches out of other true Churches to be one.

2. That it is endless to hope to give satisfaction to erring Consciences. The Grounds, say they, upon which this Separation is desired, are such upon which all other possible scruples which erring consciences may in any other cases be subject unto, may claim the privilege of the like Indulgence. And so this Toleration being the first, shall indeed but lay the Foundation and open the gap, whereto as many divisions in the Church, as there

Papers
for Ac-
count of
dation.
p. 51.
V. p. 61.

p. 66.

p. 68. may be scruples in the minds of men, shall upon the self same equity be let in. And again,
p. 73. that this will make way for infinite divisions and sub-divisions, and give countenance to a perpetual Schism, and Division in the Church.

p. 68. 3. That scruple of conscience is no protection against Schism; no cause of Separating;
p. 73. nor doth it: take off causeless Separation from being Schism, which may arise from Errors of conscience as well as carnal and corrupt Reasons; and therefore they conceive the causes of Separation must be shewn to be such as ex natura rei will bear it out.

p. 111. 4. That the Apostles notwithstanding the difference of mens Judgments did prescribe Rules of Uniformity. For, say they, they suppressed the contentions of men by the custom of the Churches of God, 1 Cor. 11. 16. and ordain the same practice in all the Churches, notwithstanding our Brethrens distinction of difference of light. 1 Cor. 7. 17. And did not the Apostles bind the burden of some necessary things on the Churches, albeit there were in those Churches gradual differences of light?

p. 113. 5. That the Apostle by this Rule in the Text, did not intend to allow Brethren who agree
p. 114. in all Substantials of Faith and Worship, to separate from one another, in those very Substantials wherein they agree. Is this, say they, to walk by the same Rule, and to mind the same things, to separate from Churches in those very things wherein we agree with them.
p. 115. We desire no more of them than we are confident was practised by the Saints at Philippi, namely to hold practical communion in things wherein they doctrinally agree.

Ibid. 6. That there is a great deal of difference between Tyranny over mens Consciences, and Rules of Uniformity. For the dissenting Brethren charged the Assembly, with setting up an Uniformity for Uniformities sake, i. e. affecting Uniformity so much, as not to regard mens Consciences; and without respect had to the varieties of Light in matters of a lesser nature; which, say they, will prove a perfect Tyranny, and it is in effect to stretch a low man to the same length with a taller, or to cut a tall man to the stature of one that is low, for Uniformities sake. To which the others answer, That they do not desire Uniformity for the sake of Tyranny, but only for Order, and Order for Edification. But for ought they could perceive, any thing that is One must be judged the foundation of Tyranny (which are their own words.) As to variety of light, they desired their Brethren to answer them in this one thing, whether some must be denied liberty of their Conscience in matter of practice, or none? If none, then, say they, we must renounce our Covenant and let in Prelacy again; and all other ways; if a denial of liberty unto some may be just, then Uniformity may be settled notwithstanding variety of lights, without any Tyranny at all. As to their similitude, they grant it to be pretty and plausible; but such arguments are popular and in artificial, having more of flourish than substance in them, For did not they endeavour to raise lower Churches to a greater height? would they permit other Church Governments if it were in their power, because men must not for Uniformities sake be pared or stretched to the measure of other men? would they endure the lower suckers at the root of their tree to grow till they had killed the tree itself? Ad populum phalaras.

From whence we see the Church of England's endeavour after Uniformity is acquitted from Tyranny over the Consciences of men by the judgment of the most learned of the Assembly of Divines; for such we do not question they chose to manage this debate, upon which the turn of their whole affairs depended.

3. A wilful Error or mistake of Conscience doth by no means excuse from sin. Thus if a man think himself bound to divide the Church by a sinful Separation; that Separation

tion is nevertheless a *sin* for his thinking himself bound to do it. For S. Paul thought Acts 16. himself bound to do many things against the name of Jesus of Nazareth, yet he calls him- 9. self a blasphemer and the greatest of sinners, for what he did under that obligation of 1 Tim. 1. Conscience. The Jews thought themselves bound in Conscience to do God Service, 3. 25. but it was a horrible mistake, when they took killing the Apostles to be any part of it. S. Joh. 16. From whence it appears, that men may do very bad things, and yet think themselves bound in Conscience to do them. I do not hence infer that the pretence of Conscience is not to be regarded, because it may be abused to so ill purposes; for no man that hath any Conscience will speak against the Power of it, and he that dec.ares against it, hath no reason to be regarded in what he saith. But that which ought to be inferred from hence, is, that man ought not to rest satisfied with the present dictates of their Consciences, for notwithstanding them, they may commit very great sins. I am afraid, the common mistaking the case of an erroneous Conscience hath done a great deal of mischief to conscientious men, and betray'd them into great security, while they are assured they do act according to their Consciences. For the question is generally put, *How far an erroneous Conscience doth oblige?* And when men hear that they must not act against their Consciences though they be mistaken, they think themselves safe enough, and enquire no further. But if they would consider, that no mans Conscience alters the nature of Good and Evil in things; that what God hath made a Duty or a Sin remains so, whatever a mans Conscience doth judge concerning them; that no man Conscience can strictly oblige him either to omit a Duty or to commit a sin; the utmost Resolution of the Case comes to this, That a man may be so perplexed and entangled by an erroneous Conscience that he may be under a necessity of sinning, if he acts either with or against it; not that God ever puts a man under the necessity of sinning, (for then it would be no sin to him, if it were unavoidable) but that by their own neglect and carelessness, without looking after due information and running on with violent Prejudices, which was the case of S. Paul and the Jews (and I wish it were not of many Christians) they may make false and rash judgments of things, and so sin either in doing or not doing what their Consciences tell them they are bound to do.

The most material Question then, in the case of an erroneous Conscience, is, What Error of Conscience doth excuse a man from Sin in following the Dictates of it? For, if the Error be wholly involuntary; i. e. if it be caused by invincible Ignorance, or after using the best means for due information of his Conscience, though the Act may be a fault in it self, yet it shall not be imputed to him as a Sin; because it wanted the consent of the Mind, by which the Will is determined; but if men fall into wilful Errors of Conscience; i. e. if they form their judgments rather by prejudice and passion and interest than from the Laws of God or just Rules of Conscience; if they do not examine things fairly on both sides, praying for divine direction; if they have not patience to hear any thing against their opinion, but run on blindly and furiously, they may in so doing act according to their Consciences, and yet they may be in as great danger of committing heinous sins as S. Paul and the Jews were. Thus if men through the power of an erroneous Conscience may think themselves bound to make Schisms and Divisions in the Church, to disobey Laws and to break in pieces the Communion of that Church, which they are, or ought to be members of, they may satisfy themselves that they pursue their Consciences, and yet for want of due care of informing themselves

themselves and judging aright, those very Actions may be wilful and damnable Sins.

Nothing now remains but to make Application of what hath been said to our own Case. And that shall be to two sorts of Persons, 1. to those who continue in the Communion of our Church, 2. to those who dissent from it.

1. To those who continue in the communion of our Church. Let us walk by the same Rule, and mind the same things. Let us study the Unity and Peace, and thereby the Honour and Safety of it. While we keep to one Rule, all people know what it is to be of our Church; if men set up their own fancies above the Rule, they charge it with imperfection; if they do not obey the Rule, they make themselves wiser than those that made it. It hath not been either the Doctrine or Rules of our Church which have ever given advantage to the Enemies of it; but the indiscretion of some in going beyond them; and the inconstancy of others in not holding to them.

Such is the Purity of its Doctrine, such the Loyalty of its Principles, such the Wisdom, and Order, and Piety of its Devotions, that none who are true Friends to any of these, can be enemies to it. Let us take heed we do not give too much occasion to our enemies to think the worse of our Church for our sakes. It is easie to observe, that most quarrels relating to Constitutions & Frames of Government are more against persons than things, when they are unsatisfied with their management, then they blame the Government; but if themselves were in place, or those they love and esteem, then the Government is a good thing, if it be in good mens hands. Thus do mens judgments vary as their interests do.

And so as to Churches, we find Uniformity and Order condemned as tyrannical, till men come into power themselves, and then the very same things and arguments are used and thought very good and substantial, which before were weak and sophistical. Those who speak now most against the Magistrates power in matters of Religion had ten substantial Reasons for it, when they thought the Magistrate on their own side. Those who now plead for Toleration, did once think it the Mother of Confusion, the Narse of Atheism, the inlet of Popery, the common Sink of all Errors and Heresies. But, if there be not much to be said against the Church's Constitution, then they are ready to lay load upon the persons of the Governours and Members of it; and thence pretend to a necessity of Separation for a purer Communion. Let us endeavour to remove this Objection, not by recrimination (which is too easie in such cases) but by living suitably to our holy Religion, by reforming our own lives, and redressing (what in us lies) the Scandals and Disorders of others. Let us by the innocency and unblameableness of our lives, the life and constancy of our devotions, the meekness and gentleness of our behaviour in our own Cause, our Zeal and Courage in Gods, add a lustre to our Religion and bring others to a Love of our Church.

II. To those who dissent from our Communion. Whether they hear, or whether they will forbear, I cannot dismiss this subject, without offering some things to them,

1. By way of Consideration,
2. By way of Advice.

(1.) I shall offer these things to their Consideration.

They that are ruled must consider, that the best policy or Constitution, so far as it is of mans regulating, hath defects and inconveniences, and affairs will be complicated; and therefore they must not be too unyielding, but bear with what is tolerable, and not easily remediable. Corbett of the sound State of Religion, p 73. 1679.

Church;

Answer;
to two
Questi-
ons. 1679.

Church; which cannot be expected in this World to be without Spot or Winkle. And if men will set themselves only to find faults, it is impossible, in this state of things, they should ever be pleased. And if they separate where they see anything amiss, they must follow his example who pursued this Principle so far, till he withdrew from all Society lest he should communicate with them in their Sin; in which condition he continued till his Children lay dead in the house, and he became utterly unable to help himself, and because no humane inventions were to be allowed about the worship of God, he had cut out of his Bible the Contents of the Chapters, and Titles of the Leaves, and so left the bare Text, without Binding or Covers. This is the Case the rigid and impracticable principles of some would bring our Churches to, by cutting off all Rules of Order and Decency, as encroachments on the Institutions of Christ.

2. I desire them to consider how impossible it is to give satisfaction to all, and how many things must be allowed a favourable interpretation in publick Constitutions and General Laws; which it is hardly possible so to frame, but there will be room left for Cavils and Exceptions. Yea When the wisest and best men have done their utmost, some of themselves confess, there may be dissatisfaction still; and if Christian Humility, Charity and Discretion, will then advise persons to acquiesce in their private security and freedom, and not to unsettle the publick Order for their private satisfaction. Why should not men practise the same vertues themselves; which they do confess, will be necessary for some at last?

Wise and good men will consider the difficulties that alwayes attend publick Establishments; and have that esteem for Peace and Order, that they will bear with any thing tolerable for the sake of it. It is a very hard case with a Church when men shall set their Wits to strain every thing to the worst sense, to stretch Laws beyond the intention and design of them, to gather together all the doubtful and obscure passages in Calendars, Translations, &c. and will not distinguish between their approbation of the Use and of the Choice of things, for upon such terms as these men think to justify the present Divisions. I much question, whether if they proceed in such a manner, they can hold Communion with any Church in the Christian world. If men be disposed to find faults, no Church can be pure enough for something will be amiss either in Doctrine, or Discipline, or Ceremonies, or Manners; but if they be disposed to Peace and Union, then Charity will cover a multitude of failings; and then according to S. Paul's advice, with all lowliness, & meekness, with long-suffering, forbearing one another in Love, they will be endeavouring to preserve the Unity of the spirit in the bond of Peace. And without the practice of the former Vertues, no Metaphysical Discourses of Unity, will signify any thing to the Churches Peace.

3. They would do well to consider, How Separation of the People from our Churches comes to be more lawful now, than in the days of our Fathers. It hath been often and evidently proved, that the most sober and learned Non-conformist of former times, notwithstanding their scruples in some points, yet utterly condemned Separation from our Churches as unlawful. And they looked upon this, not as a meer common sin of humane infirmity, but as a wilful and dangerous sin; in that it is so far from tending to the e-

Ball a-
gainst
Campus

A dis-
course of
the Reli-
gion of
England
in its due
Latitude,
Sect. 19

Such is the complicated condition of humane affairs, that it is exceeding difficult to devise a Rule or Model that shall provide for all whom Equity will plead for. Therefore the prudent and sober will acquiesce in any constitution that is in some good sort proportionable to the ends of Government. A Discourse of the Religion of England, &c. Sect. 14. Printed 1667,

See Baxter's
cure
of Divi-
sions p.
264.

Eph 4.
2, 3.

Papers
of Ac-
commo-
dation.
p. 32.

Bagshaw
against
Can.
Pres p. 2-

overthrow of Antichrist, that it upholds and maintains him; calling it a renting the Church, the disgrace of Religion, the advancement of Pride, Schism and Contention, the Offence of the Weak, the grief of the godly, who be better settled, the hardening of the wicked, and the recovery or rising again of Antichristianism; nay, even persecuting the Lord Jesus in his Host, which they revile in his ordinances, which they dishonour; and in his servants whose footsteps they slander, whose Graces they despise, whose Office they trample upon with disdain. These are the very words of one of the most learned and judicious Non-conformists before the Wars. And surely the mischiefs that followed after could not make Separation to appear less odious.

Bradshaw
against
Johnson.
S. 40. 91.
Gauges
whole Ar-
mour of
God. p.
570.

Was it a sin? was it such a sin then? And is it none now? Either our Brethren at this day, do believe it to be a sin for the people to separate, or they do not: If not, it must either be, that there are new and harder terms of Communion, which were not then; which is so far from being true, that they confess them to be rather easier for the people: or it must be, that they are gone off from the peaceable principles of their Predecessors, which they are unwilling to own. If they do believe it to be a sin, why do they suffer the people to live in a known Sin? Why do they encourage them by preaching in separate Congregations? For their Predecessors did not think it lawful, much less a duty, to preach when forbidden by a Law: neither did they understand what warrant any ordinary Minister hath in such a case by Gods word, so to draw any Church or People to his private Ministry in opposition to the Laws and Government he lived under. They understood the difference between the Apostles cases and theirs; and never thought the Apostles Woe be unto me if I preach not the Gospel, did extend to them; but thought that silenced Ministers ought to live as private Members of the Church till they were restored, and the people bound to hear others. Of which there can be far less ground to dispute, when themselves acknowledge the Doctrine by Law established to be true and sound.

Nothing
that I
know of
in the
world,
doth so
strongly
tempt
some so

4. Lastly, Let me beseech them to consider the common danger that threatens us all by means of our Divisions. We have Adversaries subtle and industrious enough to make use of all advantages to serve their own ends; and there is scarce any other they promise themselves more from, than the continuance of these breaches among our selves: This some of our Brethren themselves have been aware of; and on that account have told the People of the danger of the Principles of Separation, as to the interest of Religion in general, and the Protestant Religion in particular among us.

her conscientious men to think Popery necessary for the concord of Churches, and a violent Church Government necessary to our peace, as the woful experience of the Errors and Schisms the mad and manifold Sects that arise among those that are most against them. Baxters last Answ. to Bagshaw p. 30.

You little know what a pernicious design the Devil hath upon you, in perswading you to desire and endeavour to pull down the interest of Christ and Religion, which is upheld in the parish Churches of this Land: and to think that it is best to bring them as low in reality or reputation as you can, and to contract the Religions interest all into private meetings. *Id. p. 31. n. 25.*

Certainly, nothing would tend more to our common security than for all true and sincere Protestants to lay aside their prejudices, and mistakes, and to joyn heartily in Communion with us: which many of their Teachers at this day allow to be lawful. And how can they satisfy themselves in hazarding our Religion by not doing that, which themselves confess lawful to be done?

(2.) But if we are not yet ripe for so great a mercy as a perfect Union, yet I would

in-

intreat our Brethren to make way for it by hearkening to these following *Advices*.

1. *Not to give encouragement to rash and intemperate zeal*; which rends all in pieces, and makes reconciliation impossible. Those who see least into things, are usually the fiercest contenders about them: and such eager Disputants are fitter to make quarrels than to end them; for they can be contentious for Peace's sake, and make new differences about the ways of Unity. Wisdom and sobriety, a good judgement, a prudent temper, and freedom from prejudice will tend more to end our differences, than warm Debates, and long Disputations; which as Greg. Nazianzen said once of Councils, *seldom have had any good end*. But there is a more fiery sort of zeal, & more dangerous than this; which may lie smothering for a time, till it meets with suitable matter and a freer vent, and then it breaks out into a dreadful flame. This we have already seen such dismal effects of in this age, that we should think there were less need to give men caution against it again, were it not to be feared, that where Reason cannot prevail, Experience will not. All that we can say to such persons that may be like to move them, is, that if their *blind zeal* transport them, as it did *Sampson*, to pull down the *House* over their Heads, they will be sure to perish themselves in the fall of it; but here will lie the great difference of the case, while they and their Friends perish together, the *Philistines* without will rejoice to make the others instruments to execute their designs.

2. *Not to be always complaining of their hardships and Persecutions*; as though no People had suffered so much since the days of *Dioclesian*; whereas the severity of Laws hath been tempered with so much gentleness in the execution of them, that others have as much complained of *Indulgence*, as they of *Persecution*. It doth not look like the *Patience*, and *Humility*, and *Meekness* of the *Primitive Christians*, to make such noise and outcries of their suffering so much, when they would have been rather thankful that they suffered no more. Is this the way to Peace, to represent their case still to the world in an exasperating & provoking manner? Is this the way to incline their *Governours* to more *condescension*, to represent them to the People as an *Ibadian* persecuting Party? Where are the *Priscillians* that have been put to death by their instigation? What do such insinuations mean, but that our *Bishops* are the followers of *Ibadians* and *Idians* in their cruelty; and they of the good and meek Bishop *S. Martin*, who refused Communion with them on that account? If men do entertain such kind thoughts of themselves, and such hard thoughts of their *Superiors*, whatever they plead for, they have an inclination to Peace.

3. *Not to condemn others for that which themselves have practised, and think to be lawful in their own cases*. What outcries have some made against the Church of England, as *Cruel* and *Tyrannical*, for expecting and requiring *Uniformity*? And yet do not such men, even at this day, contend for the *Obligation* of a *Covenant*, which binds men to endeavour after uniformity in *Doctrine*, *Discipline* and *Worship*? But they want the ingenuity of *Adonibezek*, to reflect on the thumbs and the toes, which they have cut off from others; and think themselves bound to do it again, if it were in their power. Who could have been thought more moderate in this way, than those who went upon the principles of the dissenting Brethren? And yet we are assured, that even in *New England*, when their own Church-way was by Law established among them, they made it no less than *Banishment* for the *Anabaptists* to set up other Churches among them, or for any secretly to seduce others from the *Approbation* and use of *Infant-baptism*. 1651.

And

Judg 1.7.

See
Clark's
Narrative of
New England
Anabaptists
persecution A.D.
1651.

And how they have since proceeded with the *Quakers*, is very well known. Nay, even these, notwithstanding the single *Independency* of every mans *light within him*, have found it necessary to make *Rules and Orders* among themselves to govern their *Societies*, to which they expect an *uniform Obedience*; and allow no *Liberty out of the* Power and the *Truth*; as they love to speak. From all which it appears, the true controversy is not about the *Reasonableness of Uniformity*; but who shall have the power of prescribing the *Rules* of it. Is it not now a very hard case, that the *Church of England* must be loaded with bitter reproaches, and exposed to the common hatred of all *Parties* for the sake of that, which every one of them would practise if it were in their *Power*; and think it very justifiable so to do?

4. Not to inflame the peoples hearts, by making their differences with the *Church of England* to appear to be greater than they are. Let them deal honestly and faithfully with them, by letting them understand that they look on our *Churches as true Churches*, and *occasional Communion* at least with them to be lawful: (and it is hard to understand, if *occasional Communion* be lawful, that *constant Communion* should not be a *Duty*.) This were the way to abate mens great prejudices, and to soften their *Spirits*, and to prepare them for a closer *Union*. But if instead of this, they endeavour to darken and confound things, and cast mists before their eyes, that they cannot see their way clearly before them; all understanding men will conclude, they prefer some little interests of their own, before the honour of *Christ* and the *Peace of his Church*.

5. Not to harbour or foment unreasonable jealousies and suspicions in Peoples minds concerning us. This hath been one of the most successful arts of keeping up the distance and prejudices that have been so great among us, viz. by private whispers, by false suggestions, by idle stories, by unreasonable interpretation of words beyond the intention and design of those who spake them. By such devices as these, great mischief hath been done among us, and I am much afraid, is doing still. For nothing sets men at a greater distance from our *Church*, than the apprehending that we are not hearty and sincere in the *Protestant Cause*: which although it be a most groundless and malicious calumny, yet there have been some, who have had so little regard to *Conscience* or *common ingenuity*, as not only to charge particular Persons, but our *Church* it self with *Marching towards Popery*. What injustice, what uncharitableness, what impudence is it, to fasten such an imputation is it, upon a *Church* that hath hitherto continued (and long may it do so) the chief *Bulwark* of the *Protestant Cause*? Little do such persons consider, how much they serve the design of our enemies, who cannot but be mightily pleased to find their most formidable adversaries represented to the People as their *Secret Friends*.

6. Not to run the hazard of all for a shew of greater Liberty to themselves. For under this pretence our *Adversaries* endeavour to make them their *Instruments* to bring upon our Necks a Yoke which neither we nor our Fathers were able to bear. An universal Toleration is that Trojan Horse, which brings in our enemies without being seen, and which after a long Siege they hope to bring in at last under the pretence of setting our Gates wide enough open, to let in all our friends.

And then think with yourselves what advantages they will have above others;

con-

considering some mens coldness and indifferency in Religion; others uncertainty and running from one extreme to another; others easiness in being drawn away by the hopes and feares of this world; which have a wonderful influence upon changing mens opinions, even when they do not think it themselves. So that those seem very little to understand mankind, who do not apprehend the dangerous consequences of a *general Toleration*.

Those who pretend there is no danger, *because by this means the Folly of their Religion will be exposed*, do not consider what a catching disease folly is; and how natural it is for men that are fanciful in Religion to exchange one folly for another. If all men were wise and sober in Religion, there would need no *Toleration*; if they are not, we must suppose, if they had what they wished, they would do as might be expected from men wanting Wisdom and Sobriety, *i.e.* All the several Parties would be striving and contending with each other, which should be uppermost, and gain the greatest interest.

And what would the fruit of all such contentions be, but endless disputes, and exposing the follies of one another, till at last *Religion* it self be sunk into the greatest contempt; or men, through meer weariness of contending, be willing even to submit to *Papal Tyranny*, because it pretends to some kind of *Unity*? And verily you will keep up the papists hope, that
 by an *Universal Toleration*, they may at last come in on equal Terms with you, or by connivence, be endured as much as you. And if they be equal in *England* with you, their transmarine advantages will make them more than equal notwithstanding their disadvantages in their cause, and their contrariety to Kingly interest, Baxters last Answ. to Bagshaw. p. 31

So that, upon the whole matter, if we would consult the Honour of God and Religion, the Peace and Tranquillity of the Church we live in; if we would prevent the great Designs of our enemies, and leave the Protestant Religion here established to Posterity, we ought to follow the Apostles Advice, *in walking by the same Rule, and in minding the same things.*

F I N I S.